

Disability Inclusion Helpdesk Report No: 110

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1. Methodology

This GEDSI analysis takes an intersectional approach to understanding trends in key areas of interest for FCDO in Latin America. It is based on a literature review of published and unpublished resources, including learning reports, evidence reviews, policy documents, and other analyses. Following standard Helpdesk practice, data was selected according to the following criteria:

- **Focus:** regional-level evidence on the state of GEDSI within Latin America in line with the agreed research questions
- **Time period:** 2013 – Present
- **Language:** English and Spanish
- **Publication Status:** publicly available and unpublished material shared with the research team by key stakeholders and FCDO
- **Geographical focus:** Latin America

Due to the limited availability of evidence, some reports focusing on Latin America and the Caribbean have also been included in our review. This evidence is highlighted in the report where it appears.

This is a rapid GEDSI analysis, comprising eight combined days of researcher time and one day of senior expert time. As such, this report provides an overview of key GEDSI trends and issues but is not a comprehensive GEDSI analysis. We would recommend sensitisation of the findings of this report with civil society groups and diverse representative organisations including afro-descendant people, people with disabilities, indigenous peoples, LGBTQI+ people, migrants, women and girls, and young people. Where possible within the time constraints, variation in regional trends has been highlighted. However, country-specific information is outside the scope of this report and should instead be contained within country GEDSI analyses.

2. What are the positive benefits of prioritising gender equality, disability, and social inclusion on poverty reduction, trade and economic development, peace and stability, and addressing climate change and disasters?

- > **The inclusion of socially excluded groups improves prospects for economic development and increased GDP.** In Latin America and the Caribbean, gender gaps in labour force participation reduce GDP per capita by 14% (UN Women, 2016). Global data suggests that the inclusion of people with disabilities could lead to an increase of between 3% and 7% of GDP (World Bank, 2021).
- > **Addressing burdens of unpaid care and domestic work can increase women's labour force participation.** A study in Nicaragua showed the propensity of women to work outside the home increased by approximately 23% due to more efficient, less time-intensive home production work following the provision of lighting and modern cooking appliances (Grogan et al, 2013). Women in Latin America have significant burdens of unpaid care and domestic work: unpaid work in the home represents 20% of GDP in Colombia, 22.8% in Mexico and

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25.3% in Costa Rica (ECLAC, 2022).

- > **An estimated nine out of ten maternal deaths in Latin America and the Caribbean are preventable through access to quality care and contraception** (FIGO, 2023). In 2020, there were 97 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in Latin America and the Caribbean, which is ten times higher than the OECD average (OECD, 2023).
- > **An active civil society, including groups representing women and other socially excluded groups, is advancing the GEDSI agenda in Latin America.** Civil society organisations have been effective in raising public awareness and achieving legislative change on a range of issues, including abortion rights, environmental issues and gender-based violence (for example, the Latin America-wide Green Wave movement has played a critical role in abortion being legalised including in Argentina and Colombia (New York Times, 2021).
- > **Socially excluded groups have a key role to play to address the climate crisis.** As noted below in this report, promoting the participation and leadership of indigenous people, afro-descendant people, and women on climate change can fuel climate activism and lead to an increase in climate-resilient practices and inclusive adaptation and mitigation approaches.
- > **Global evidence finds peace agreements are 35% more likely to last** and 64% less likely to fail where women are meaningfully included in the process (UN Women, 2015). The landmark peace agreement with FARC in Columbia has demonstrated the benefits of active women's engagement in the peace-making process (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017).
- > **Incorporating gender equality policies across the region.** Some multinational companies in Latin America have introduced diversity and inclusion initiatives to attract, retain, and promote women's participation in the business sector. This initiative has positively impacted the LAC business sector, encouraging best practices (UN Women, 2020). However, more work is needed, as only 21% of companies in the region have written gender equality policies, while 63% do not prioritise gender equality. The UNDP has developed a Gender Equality Strategy for 2023-2025, specifically targeting Latin America and the Caribbean. This strategy aims to enhance gender equality in the fields of innovation, digitalization, and finance (UNDP, 2023).

3. What are the key GEDSI trends in legislation and civic space?

Legislative frameworks provide a platform for promoting GEDSI across Latin America. All countries in Latin America have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). In addition, many countries have commitments to GEDSI and anti-discrimination based on ethnicity, race, gender, and other characteristics in their constitutions and national laws.

However, the implementation of these treaties and laws remains a challenge across the region. Socially excluded groups often face discrimination, restriction of rights, and violence. Attitudes towards people with disabilities commonly reflect the 'charity model' of disability rather than a human rights approach. The impact of these barriers on key critical sectors, including climate change, education, employment, health, and security, is

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presented later in this report.

Social attitudes towards GEDSI across the region are mixed. Attitudes towards the LGBTQI+ community are becoming more favourable in all countries, except for Peru (Barrientos and Bahamondes, 2022). However, even in the countries with the highest mean scores on an index of justifiability, the data show mild average support rather than acceptance (ibid). According to a recent UN Women CEDAW submission, indigenous women and girls in Latin America face discrimination and unequal access to education, health, work, land and public participation. This marginalisation is more intense for indigenous women with disabilities and women of diverse sexual identities and orientations (UNWomen, 2021). Machismo, patriarchal attitudes and traditional gender roles cast women in traditional roles of housewives and mothers, whilst men are breadwinners (IADB, 2023). For men and boys, this can lead to reduced educational opportunities as they drop out of school to work, increased risky behaviours relating to drugs and violence, negative impacts on their mental health, and increased likelihood of perpetrating gender based violence (Tsapalas et al., 2020). For women and girls, dominant social norms can restrict access to the work opportunities as well as full engagement in society, increasing the likelihood of experiencing poverty and violence. Research from the region suggests that poverty and exclusion are key drivers of women's involvement in organised crime (Colombian Organized Crime Observatory, 2020), and other recent evidence from Northern Central America notes the negative impact of organised crime and gang culture on broader gender dynamics, unequal gender power relations and high levels of gender-based violence (IACHR, 2023).

Gender-based violence is a major concern across the region. Women and girls face multiple forms of violence, including high rates of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence (Smit and Fraser, 2022).¹ The lifetime non-partner sexual violence rate in Latin America is 11% for women aged 15-49, almost double the global average of 6% (WHO, 2021). Latin America has the highest rate of gender-based deaths (femicide) in the world, with 10 of the 12 countries with the highest rates. In 2021, of the 18 countries or territories that provided information, 11 had a rate equal to or higher than one victim of femicide per 100,000 women. In 29 countries, at least 12 femicides happen every day (CEPAL, 2022). There have been high levels of conflict-related sexual violence in countries such as Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Peru (Smit and Fraser, 2022). Governments and paramilitary forces are the main perpetrators, but almost all armed groups (including criminal gangs) have perpetrated sexual violence against women and girls.

Multiple laws addressing GBV and VAWG are in place across the region, as well as laws that apply to GBV indirectly, such as anti-discrimination measures to redress the subordination of women or other populations (UNFPA LACRO, 2020). However, even though there have been national efforts to approve new legislation to support direct and indirect victims, in many cases legal frameworks are limited or ineffective. This can result in widespread impunity, exacerbated by flawed regulations and resistance to reporting ('politics of silence'), especially in the case of women who face more significant disadvantages because of their social, economic, racial or ethnic background (Freidenberg and Gilas, 2022).

¹ The Ending Violence Helpdesk conducted a [regional analysis of violence against women and girls in Latin America](#) in 2022. See the full report for more information.

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Civic space is restricted in most countries in Latin America. The CIVICUS Monitor (2023), which aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of the enabling conditions for civil society worldwide, ranked only one country in the region – Uruguay – as open.



Figure 1 The openness of civic space in Latin America. Source: CIVICUS Monitor, 2023

High levels of violence have impacted the openness of civic space. In 2022, Mexico was the deadliest country in the world for journalists, and there are high levels of targeting of community leaders (often linked to environmental issues) and human rights defenders across many countries in the region (Reporters Without Borders, 2023; Reuters, 2022; Sánchez-Garzoli, 2022). In 2022, Latin America accounted for 88% of the killings of land and environmental defenders in the world (Global Witness, 2023). Colombia was the worst-affected country, with 60 murders. Across the region, indigenous peoples, afro-descendent people, small-scale farmers, and environmental activists and lawyers are targeted by lethal and non-lethal violence for opposing agribusiness, illegal mining, illegal logging, and illegal taking of indigenous lands (ibid). Despite the risks of death and persecution by governments, indigenous peoples in Latin America have taken a strong activist role in the struggle to address the climate crisis. Collaborating with other indigenous groups in Indonesia and Africa, the Latin American indigenous community formed the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities to protect biodiversity and combat climate change (New York Times, 2022; Mongabay, 2021).

Despite the restrictions and violence, there is an active civil society in Latin America which has achieved success in promoting GEDSI. In the face of the rising rate of GBV, aggravated by widening gender gaps in the economic, social and political spheres due to the COVID-19 pandemic, multiple protests took place around the region in 2022, demanding meaningful efforts to ensure women and girls are able to exercise their right to live a life free from violence and discrimination (Voz de América, 2022). The 'Pañuelo Verde' (Green Wave) movement has also seen advances in abortion rights (López Romero, 2022). The Ni Una Menos movement, originating in Argentina in 2015 in response to high rates of violence against women, has expanded across Latin America. As well as combatting gender-based violence, Ni Una Menos played a key role in advocating for women's reproductive health rights, contributing to the legalisation of abortion rights in Argentina in 2018 (Sjöberg, 2018; NPR, 2021). Social movements and organisations supporting LGBTQ+ rights played a significant role in achieving progress in legislation in the region, and they have a critical role to play in responding to violence in all countries. However, progress is hampered by conservative traditional values (Every, 2022).

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There has been a gradual growth in the number of female legislators in Latin America and the Caribbean in recent years, leading the way towards parity in national parliaments (CEPAL, 2023). Latin America became the region with the highest number of women presidents when Cristina Fernández (Argentina), Dilma Rousseff (Brazil), Michelle Bachelet (Chile) and Laura Chinchilla (Costa Rica) held office simultaneously in their respective countries (Moreira, Delbono, Fernández Soto and Pedetti, 2022). This progress comes as a result of decades of struggle for space within political parties. Feminist movements have proposed legal reforms to broaden the framework of rights and the actions carried out by states to comply with regional and international human rights commitments (CEPAL, 2023). The adoption of affirmative action mechanisms, such as quotas and parity laws, has been crucial to the advancement of women's political participation (Moreira, Delbono, Fernández Soto and Pedetti, 2022). When it comes to local governments, however, progress has been slow: the low percentage of women mayors indicates that men continue to concentrate power at the highest decision-making levels in sub-national governments (CEPAL, 2023). About 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean deny people with disabilities the right to stand for public office (World Bank, 2021).

4. What are the key GEDSI trends in health, education, employment, and social protection?

a. Health

Whilst there has been significant progress in many key health indicators over the last ten years, these improvements have not been equally beneficial across different populations. There have been increases in life expectancy, decreases in maternal and child mortality, and better public health management of diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, measles and HIV/AIDs. Despite this, maternal mortality rates remain high compared to OECD (2023) averages, sexual and reproductive rights and health are restricted, and many people from socially excluded groups, including afro-descendant people, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ communities, face barriers to accessing health services. Obesity, non-communicable diseases, and climate-related stresses are of increasing concern across the region.

Life expectancy at birth is slowly rising across Latin America and the Caribbean. However, there are stark disparities for socially excluded groups. On average, life expectancy reached 75.1 years in 2021, an increase of 4 years since 2000 (OECD, 2023). However, life expectancy is lower for afro-descendant people and only 35 years for transgender women in Latin America as a result of exclusion and violence (CIDH, 2015; PAHO, 2021).

Latin America and the Caribbean region had the most significant drop in life expectancy during the COVID-19 pandemic, dropping to 72.1 years in 2021 from 75.1 years (CEPAL, 2022). In 2020 and 2021, there were an estimated 2.3 million excess deaths in Latin America and the Caribbean, representing 15% of global excess deaths (OECD, 2023). Most excess deaths occurred among men (60% of the total) and people aged 60 or older (75%).

Latin America is one of the fastest ageing regions in the world. The number of persons ages 60 and older is expected to climb from 59 million to 196 million between 2021 and 2050 (World Bank, 2021). This increases the need for health and social protection systems

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that meet the needs of older persons, including older women and older people with disabilities.

Unmet mental health needs are a leading source of morbidity and mortality in the Americas (PAHO, 2023). The Americas is the only WHO region where suicide rates have been increasing. There are numerous challenges to accessing quality care due to low government funding for mental health services and poor service coverage. The mental health and substance use needs of socially excluded groups, particularly indigenous peoples and afro-descendants, are less likely to be met (ibid). The COVID-19 pandemic had a pronounced effect on mental health, especially for young people and people who were unemployed or experiencing financial difficulties (OECD, 2023).

People from socially excluded groups face barriers to accessing health services. A 2021 study found systematic disadvantages for afro-descendant people in maternal mortality, infant mortality, access to complete vaccination programmes and access to adequate housing and basic sanitation in 80% of the countries they analysed in Latin America (PAHO, 2021).

People with disabilities face harassment, violence and other barriers to health service access. In hospitals and residential institutions, adults and children with disabilities experience violence, including ill-treatment, neglect, the use of restraints to control or punish residents, sedation, as well as inhumane and degrading conditions (Human Rights Watch, 2018; OHCHR, 2023). There is significant evidence that the institutionalisation of babies and children can cause developmental delays, irreversible psychological damage, and can lead to lower educational attainment, dependency on social welfare, and higher risks of homelessness, imprisonment, unwanted pregnancy, early parenthood, substance misuse, self-harm, and suicide (WHO and UNICEF, 2012; UNCRC, 2016). Inaccessible public transport, inaccessible communications and information campaigns, and financial costs, also present barriers to people with disabilities accessing health services.

The increasing severity of climate-related threats to health, particularly heat exposure, is increasing faster than the capacity to respond (OECD, 2023). In Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of annual deaths attributable to heat exposure of people aged 65 and older increased on average by almost 240% between 2000-04 and 2017-21. The frequency of malaria and dengue outbreaks is likely to increase as the climate becomes increasingly warm and humid.

Across the region, sexual and reproductive health and rights are contested. Since 1994, several countries have liberalised their abortion laws, expanding the grounds for gaining access to legal abortion (voluntary interruption of pregnancy), including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guyana, Mexico and Uruguay (Centre for Reproductive Rights, 2023). Others, including El Salvador and Nicaragua, have removed legal grounds for abortion. In Mexico, states are in the process of reforming their laws to comply with the Supreme Court of Mexico's decision to recognise the right to safe, legal and free abortion services within a 'short period' of time (laws on abortion are determined at the state level, due to the federal system). Rates of pregnancy amongst afro-descendant 15-19 year olds are higher than those of non-afro-descendant adolescents in 7 out of 11 Latin American countries where data is available (multiple sources in PAHO, 2021). Use of, and access to, modern contraception is lower amongst afro-descendant women because of barriers to health information access, financial barriers, fear of side effects, religious beliefs and opposition from partners ([ECLAC, 2018](#)).

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Figure 2: Abortion Laws in Latin America. Data from Center for Reproductive Rights, 2023.

Maternal mortality rates in Latin America and the Caribbean are high. It is estimated that 9 out of 10 maternal deaths are preventable through access to quality care and contraception (FIGO, 2023). In 2020, there were 97 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, which is ten times higher than the OECD average (OECD, 2023). The reduction in maternal mortality rates has slowed in the last decade, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (UNFPA, 2020; WHO, 2019). UNFPA (2020) estimated that almost 3,000 maternal deaths could have been averted if the pandemic had not had an impact on the provision of SRHR services. Women and girls from socially excluded groups (particularly with high levels of poverty) were more likely to be affected by the reduction in SRHR and maternal health provision. Between 2020 and 2021, 93% of maternal deaths associated with COVID-19 occurred among indigenous and afro-descendant women (De Mucio and Gordillo-Tobar, 2023).

The average infant mortality rate has fallen in Latin America and the Caribbean but remains 2.7 times higher than the OECD average (OECD, 2023). The average infant mortality rate was 15 per 1,000 live births in 2020, representing a 38% decrease from 2000.

b. Education

Significant progress has been made in increasing access to education for girls and women in Latin America. Across the region, there are high levels of net enrolment in education at primary and secondary levels. In 2019, the net primary education enrolment was 97.5% for girls and 96.9% for boys (UNESCO, 2022). Boys and young men are at higher risk of dropping out of secondary and tertiary education due to social pressure for them to earn an income to support their families. For girls, remaining in school is often seen as the best option to stay safe and avoid violence (UNCTAD, 2020). Due to barriers young people face in accessing SRHR services, early pregnancy and the need to provide for a child is a common cause of dropping out.

Women and girls are more likely to be in primary, secondary, and tertiary education than boys and men. Net enrolment in secondary education for girls and boys in lower secondary education was more than 80% in several Latin American countries in 2020. Women are more likely to complete education in Latin America and the Caribbean: 67.4% of women aged 20-24 completed secondary education compared to 60.9% of men

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(ECLAC, 2022a). Rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations are less likely to attend education – particularly at secondary, technical and higher education levels.

Despite higher levels of female educational attendance and attainment, gendered disparities exist in the subjects studied. In particular, gender gaps persist in sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) due to cultural norms and structural barriers, including gender stereotyping and low representation of women in STEM fields (ECLAC, 2022a).

Children with disabilities are less likely to attend school than children without disabilities and are more likely to face discrimination and violence. Children with disabilities are four times less likely than children without disabilities to attend primary school in Latin America and the Caribbean (World Bank, 2021). At secondary and tertiary levels, the gaps in attendance and completion between students with and without disabilities are more pronounced, particularly for student who belong to an ethnic minority (see figure 3 below). While at least 22 countries in the region have outlawed disability-based discrimination in schools (ibid), few countries offer school facilities and programmes that are inclusive for children with a range of impairment types. Disability exclusion in education is compounded issues like inaccessible public transport and the increased likelihood that children with disabilities are living in poverty.

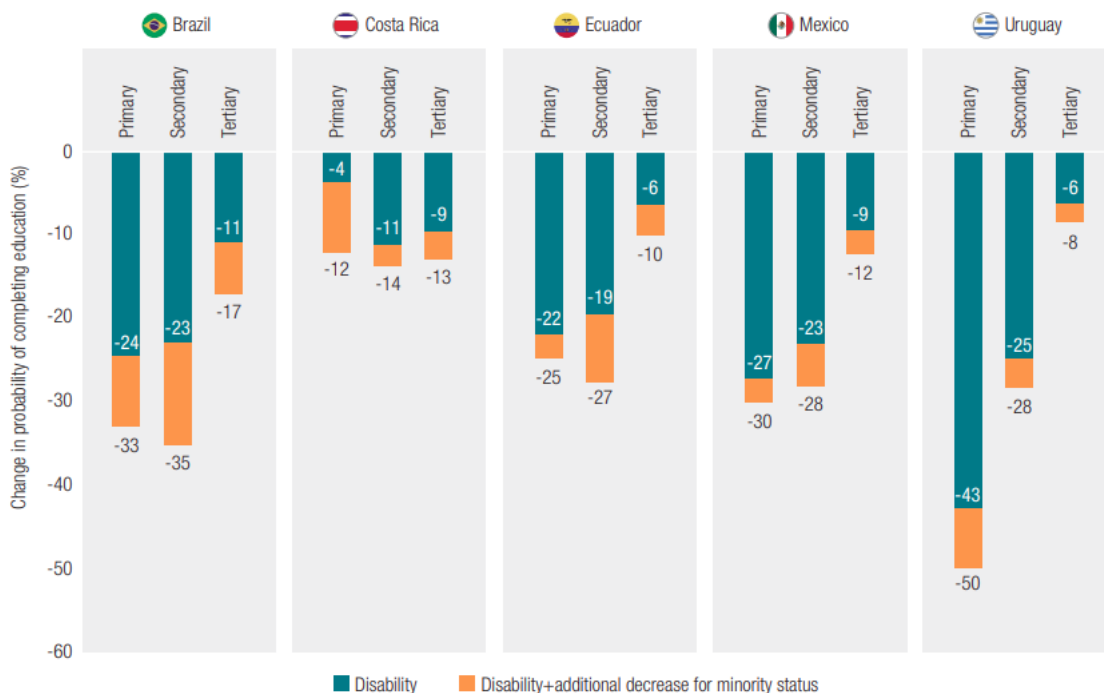


Figure 3: decrease in probability of completing education by disability and ethnic minority status, all levels of disability (%). Source Integrated Public Use Microdata Series in World Bank, 2021.

The inclusion of afro-descendant children in school is mixed across the region. In Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Venezuela, the attendance rate is lower for young afro-descendant people, whilst attendance rates are slightly higher than non—afro-descendants in Argentina, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama (PAHO, 2021). In all of these countries, girls’ attendance was higher than boys. A 2015 study using census data in 8 Latin American countries found that race and ethnicity were essential predictors of education, even when controlling for social class and other variables (Telles et al., 2015).

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Violence towards LGBTQ+ children is a crucial barrier to education. This includes bullying, sexual violence and other severe acts of violence perpetrated by students or the institution and school personnel. While the demand for inclusion in education has gained strength in recent years in political agendas, educational reforms and the implementation of public policies in various countries, progress is mixed across the region (Barrientos and Lovera, 2020).

c. Employment and Trade

There are significant disparities in access to and types of employment based on disability status, ethnicity, gender, and race in Latin America. Women have a significantly lower labour market participation rate than men across Latin America (UNCTAD, 2020). An estimated 30 million young men and women aged 15-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean are not in education, training, or employment, of which 73% are women and 66% live in urban areas (ibid).

Women are significantly less likely to own and lead businesses than men in Latin America and the Caribbean. Based on a survey of more than 1,000 companies in 20 countries in the region, a study found that women own 14% of businesses and hold 15% of management positions (Basco et al., 2021). Key barriers to women's professional growth include structural discrimination, gendered social norms and lack of diversity training, lack of childcare, parental leave and protections, and lack of flexible office hours.

Women have a significant domestic burden, creating barriers to employment or creating a 'double' shift of paid and unpaid work. Before the pandemic, women in Latin America and the Caribbean were doing three times more unpaid domestic and care work than men (ECLAC, 2022b). Women were more likely than men to report an increase in time spent on caregiving and domestic work during the pandemic due to school closures and mobility restrictions (World Bank Group and UNDP, 2022).

Due to intersecting inequalities and the legacy of the trade of enslaved people, afro-descendant women are less likely to be employed. A 2018 ECLAC study based on census microdata found that afro-descendant women had the highest unemployment rate in 5 of 11 countries with data available: in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, the unemployment rate is 2 or 3 times higher than that for afro-descendant men (see table 2 below). Where they are employed, they are more likely to have more poorly paid and less prestigious positions, particularly in domestic and manual work. However, data is variable across the region, as demonstrated in the table below.

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Figure 4 Unemployment rates for persons 15 years of age and over by ethnicity/race and sex, latest year available (percentages). Source: ECLAC, 2018

There are variations in parental leave, maternity protection, and gender pay gaps across the region. A 2021 study found that almost six out of ten companies in Latin America and the Caribbean do not provide additional parental leave beyond legal requirements (Basco et al., 2021). In the region, women in the formal economy earn, on average, 20% less than men. Women domestic workers and other informal workers receive even lower salaries (Care International, 2023).

People with disabilities are more likely to be excluded from the labour market, earn less, and face more discrimination than people without disabilities. In Latin America and the Caribbean, one in two people with disabilities who are the head of a household is economically inactive (World Bank, 2021). Rates of working in the informal economy are 11% higher for people with disabilities than people without disabilities (ibid). Working in the informal sector, often means that people are left out of social security systems and retirement or health schemes. Per sons with disabilities face an increased risk of work-related accidents as informal jobs are less likely to provide reasonable accommodations or assistive technology.

Due to overlapping markers of discrimination, people with disabilities who also belong to another socially excluded group face larger pay gaps. As shown in figure 5, people with disabilities who are also women, live in a rural area, are indigenous or an afro-descendant often experience larger percentage point decreases in the wages they receive (World Bank, 2021).

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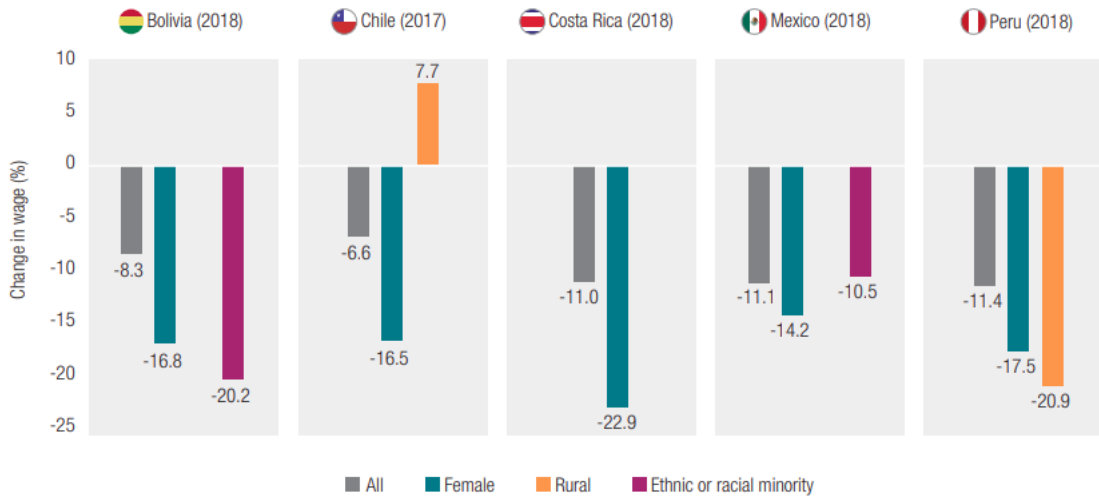


Figure 5 Percentage points decrease in wage if person (ages 18-59) has a disability and is a woman, lives in rural areas, or is indigenous or an afro-descendant. Source CEDLAS and World Bank in World Bank, 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a pronounced impact on the labour market in Latin America, particularly for women, young people and workers in the informal sector (ECLAC, 2022a). The pandemic led to an 18-year setback in women’s labour force participation (ECLAC, 2022b). Women who worked before the pandemic were more likely to lose their jobs than men, and women who did not work were less likely to enter the workforce and more likely than men to join the informal sector if they did (World Bank Group and UNDP, 2022). The sectors with the highest rates of job losses during the pandemic – restaurant, tourism, and domestic services – employ high proportions of women (over 60%) and were slow to recover after the pandemic.

The Gender Parity Accelerators, a collaborative effort by the World Economic Forum, are actively addressing economic gender gaps in nine Latin American countries. This initiative (also known as ‘Iniciativas Paridad de Género’) operates as a public-private partnership aimed at resolving structural issues. The primary focus is on reducing the gender wage gap and fostering increased participation of women in the labour force within these regions (World Economic Forum, 2023). Several regional and international trade policies prioritise gender equality. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC), involving Latin American countries like Chile, Peru, and Mexico, actively incorporates gender equality into its trade policies. The Pacific Alliance, established in 2011 with members such as Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Mexico, addresses gender issues in trade through a dedicated technical working group. This group focuses on mainstreaming gender, integration, and supporting female entrepreneurs in trade. Additionally, between 2016 and 2017, Latin American countries like Chile, Uruguay, Mexico, Peru, and Colombia negotiated trade agreements with specific chapters and protocols dedicated to mainstreaming gender and promoting women’s economic empowerment (Frohmann, 2017).

d. Social Protection

The COVID-19 pandemic and related financial instability has marked a turning point in progress towards the extension of contributory and non-contributory social protection coverage in Latin America (ILO, 2021). During the pandemic, the employment rate fell, and the number of public expenditure programmes needed to strengthen public health systems, support families, and protect the productive structure of countries, increased. In Latin America,

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average central government expenditure increased by 3.3% of GDP, reaching the highest levels since 1950.

Social protection programmes across the region are generally not gender-sensitive. A study of conditional cash transfers in nine countries in Latin America, found that most programmes reinforce stereotypes and gender expectations of mothers as the main caregivers (Ginestra, 2020). Most programmes seek to address child poverty and often assign mothers as recipients of cash transfers on the assumption that they will spend more on their children's needs compared to male care-givers. There are some promising developments as some programmes are explicitly target people excluded from other social protection programmes or considered intersecting risks and vulnerabilities and included people with disabilities and ethnic minorities. Conditionalities associated with some programmes, such as mandatory health check-ups or school attendance, often disproportionately disadvantage women who were expected to meet these conditions regardless of the availability of health and education services. Social protection schemes in the region often fail to meet the needs of informal workers, who are often women or people from socially excluded groups (UNDP, 2021). Migrant workers are often not included in official statistics and excluded from social protection programmes (World Bank, 2021).

The general lack of disability inclusive social protection systems is a concern. Only 57.7% of people with severe disabilities in Latin America and the Caribbean receive cash benefits (ILO, IDA and UNPRPD, 2022). Nearly 7 in 10 households with persons with disabilities are vulnerable to poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean as a result of their exclusion from markets, services, and spaces (World Bank, 2021). The probability of household with a person with a disability increases if it is in a rural area or there is at least one member of the household who self-identifies as a woman, indigenous or an afro-descendant. The strong likelihood that people with disabilities will work in the informal sector increases the need for disability inclusive social protection systems.

5. What are the key GEDSI trends in climate change and security?

a. Climate change

Latin America is already seeing the effects of climate change, with negative impacts on food and water security, health, economies, and cultural heritage. In 2023, climate-related events included shrinking of glaciers, prolonged droughts and forest fires in Chile, intense rain and floods in Brazil, and heavy rains and mudslides in Peru (Praeli, 2023). There are many barriers to adaptation in the region, including poverty, injustice and violence (ibid).

Climate change is already having wide-ranging implications across sectors, including health and economic empowerment. By 2030, the equivalent of 1.6 million jobs in South America and 800,000 jobs in Central America and Mexico could be lost to reductions in productivity due to heat stress (ILO and IDB, 2020). Heat stress will particularly affect outdoor workers, such as those working in construction, agriculture, and street vendors and the wider informal sector. About 22.5 million new jobs in sectors such as eco-tourism, green construction, sustainable agriculture and food production, clean energy, and energy efficiency can be created if the Latin American region undergoes a just transition. However, women will not benefit from these new jobs, as 80% of them will be in male-dominated sectors (Saget

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et.al., 2020; Pucheta and Sanchez, 2022). **By 2050, there could be more than 17 million internal climate migrants in Latin America**, due to climate-related disasters, sea level rise, water scarcity, and poor conditions for growing crops (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and The World Bank, 2018).

Effects of climate change on farming disproportionately affects the food security of socially excluded groups. Women, indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, and people with disabilities often have smaller and lower quality plots of land. They face limited access to the information and resources required for adaptation and climate resilient farming, and they face increased risks during climate-related disasters and weather variability. Nonetheless, it is recognised that these groups are among the rural groups with the greatest potential to contribute to climate change mitigation in Latin America, due to their ancestral knowledge and collective territorial practices (FAO, 2021).

Climate change is adversely affecting the ancestral lands of indigenous peoples in Latin America, undermining their cultural survival and livelihoods. In some regions, indigenous peoples have been forced to leave their lands as a result of climate change and environmental degradation (Perez and Tomaselli, 2021). Indigenous peoples are active in campaigns and negotiations on climate change, including through national lobbying and UN climate negotiations (Rowling, 2019). However, often this environmental activism is met with aggressive opposition, leading to violence and harassment against activists (as evidenced by growing media coverage and wide condemnation of increasing illegal activities in the Amazon). In 2020, a staggering 202 human rights defenders lost their lives in the Amazon basin countries, reflecting the grim consequences of such opposition, as highlighted earlier in the report (The Lancet Regional Health - Americas, 2022; Rights + Resources, 2021).

b. Security

Latin America and the Caribbean is described as the most violent region in the world, due to high rates of political and criminal violence (Arjona, 2021). Latin America has the highest homicide rate in the world, with 36.6 male and 3.7 female homicide deaths per 100,000 population (UN, 2023). Murder rates are driven by increasing cocaine production, increased activity and fragmentation of gangs, increased flow of weapons, a culture of impunity, corruption, weak justice systems, lack of trust in police forces, persistent inequalities and a lack of socioeconomic opportunities (InSight Crime, 2023; UNDP, 2023). While 11 countries saw a decrease in their homicide rates in 2022 (e.g., El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico), another 11 rose, some steeply (Igarapé Institute, n.d.). Ecuador saw a 86.3% increase in murders between 2021 and 2022, which is primarily attributed to rival gangs fighting over increasing amounts of cocaine business and traffic from Colombia (InSight Crime, 2023). In 2022, the International Rescue Committee warned that escalating violence, particularly homicides, could exacerbate existing humanitarian crises and force hundreds to flee their homes.

Violence can amplify and exacerbate existing inequalities, as it tends to disproportionately affect socially excluded groups (Arjona, 2021). The majority of victims of homicide are young men who live in poor areas. In 2018, researchers found that approximately half of all homicide victims in Latin America and the Caribbean were men between 15 and 29 years of age (Muggah & Tobón, 2018). Data is scarce, but evidence suggests that ethnic minorities are more likely to be homicide victims. The homicide rate of Brazil's afro-descendant population was 43.1 per 100,000 people in 2017, compared to 16.0 for the non-afro-descendant population (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada

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(Ipea) y Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2019 in PAHO, 2021). Despite some recent progress, Latin America is the most violent region towards people with non-hegemonic sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, (Iniciativa Spotlight and UNFPA, 2021). There are still many barriers to LGBTQ+ inclusion and protection and are major differences between Latin American countries when it comes to ensuring LGBTQ+ rights (Martinez et al., 2023).

State violence, particularly police violence, is a concern in many Latin American countries. Political violence has decreased since the 1960s and 1970s with violent state repression becoming less frequent and most civil wars ending (Arjona, 2021). Despite this, some violent repression of protests continues. Confidence in the police in Latin America and the Caribbean is the lowest in the world, with only 52% of adults surveyed reporting confidence in their local police in 2022 (Gallup, 2023).

Civic leaders, human rights defenders, journalists, and politicians are targets of violence. Between 2015 and 2019, 75% of the assassinations of human rights defenders worldwide took place in Latin America and the Caribbean (Arjona, 2021). Politicians opposing ruling parties or the interests of criminal groups, have been targeted. Ecuadorian presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio with a history of exposing corruption and human rights violations was killed leaving a campaign event in 2023 (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Violence towards women legislators has become one of the main barriers to accessing and exercising citizenship and political rights in Latin America, with systems falling behind in asserting institutional frameworks that guarantee the protection of women's political-electoral rights. While some countries do have strong legislation, such as Mexico, the majority still have medium to weak regulations (Freidenberg and Gilas, 2022). Amidst a growing concern regarding political violence against women, the Inter-American Model Law to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence Against Women in Political Life was adopted by the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism of the Belém do Pará Convention at its Thirteenth Meeting, held in Mexico in October 2016 (MESECVI, 2017). This model law is an instrument for conceptualising political violence against women, and for identifying the bodies responsible and the guidelines for action in terms of prevention, attention, punishment and reparation (ONU Mujeres and CIM, 2020).

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Figure 6: 2022 Homicide Rates in Latin America. Source: Insight Crime, 2023

Crime levels are high in Latin America, including illegal mining, deforestation, and trafficking in drugs and people. Organised crime is often associated with criminal governance. People in the slums of large cities, rural towns on trafficking routes, and villages in coca and poppy plantations often live under the coercive rule of armed actors (Arjona, 2021). Central America has the highest number of detected human trafficking victims in the world (UNODC, 2023). Whilst in 2021 there was a decrease in detected human trafficking victims, this is attributed to lower institutional capacity to detect victims during the COVID-19 pandemic and more hidden trafficking activities. In Central America, women (25% of victims) and girls (58%) are the majority of detected victims of human trafficking, and trafficking for sexual exploitation is most common form of exploitation at 71% (ibid). In South America, women victims of trafficking make up 49% of total detected victims and 87% of detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Indigenous peoples are particularly affected by illegal drugs trading, logging gold mining and wild animal trafficking (IDRC, 2023). Issues include land thefts and polluting of rivers essential for water supplies and fishing, which is exacerbated by decreasing water levels associated with climate change.

Humanitarian emergencies, security concerns, such as fleeing criminal violence, and a lack of economic opportunities are fuelling an increase in internal displacement and migration. A lack of legal pathways for migration has pushed people to attempt to cross the Darién Gap at the Colombia-Panama border (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Although ongoing for decades, the scale of this migration notably increased in 2015, doubling annually from 2021 to 2022. Factors contributing to this surge include forced displacement due to civil unrest, political instability, gang violence, environmental degradation, new visa restrictions among Latin American countries, and socio-economic hardship. Some undertake this journey to access better medical treatments for their disabled or sick family members in the United States (International Crisis Group, 2023; Migration Policy Institute, 2023). It is estimated over half a million people have crossed over the last year. Asylum seekers and migrants face risks from the difficult terrain, including

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flash floods, falls from cliffs, and mosquito-borne dengue fever, and from criminal groups controlling the routes, including theft, sexual violence, disappearances and death. Protection and humanitarian assistance are limited. The IOM (2023) reported that at least 234 people had disappeared in the Darién between January 2021 and September 2023, recognising that anecdotal reports suggested this was a small fraction of the lives lost. Between April 2021 and November 2023, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) assisted 950 people, most of them women, who reported sexual violence crossing the Darién Gap (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

The profile of migrants is changing, with more women and children attempting the crossing. Prior to 2019, migrants and asylum seekers crossing the Darién Gap were mainly adult men, now, they are families with children, women, including pregnant and breastfeeding women, and unaccompanied or separated children and adolescents. The impact of this migration has led to indigenous communities in Panama diverting their attention from essential tasks to aid migrants in completing the final boat crossing into Panama (OHCHR, 2023). Notable, approximately 22 percent of those crossing between January and September 2023 were children (Panama's National Migration Service, 2023 in Human Rights Watch, 2023).

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